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ABSTRACT

The proceedings of a conference for administrators, faculty, and staff of developmental education programs are summarized. An introductory section outlines the history, development, and definition of developmental education in the United States and gives statistics on the number and percentage of various institution types reporting developmental program activities, with breakdowns for reading, English, mathematics, and special admissions programs in two- and four-year colleges. The objective of the conference is described as helping programs improve learning environments without sacrificing quality of instruction. The keynote speech by Willa B. Player is outlined and the three rotating conference sessions are described. The sessions focused on course development (student characteristics, instructional objectives, content selection, the learning process, and instructional analysis); instructional and learning styles; and analytical reasoning. Results of a conference evaluation survey are given. Major conference recommendations include development of: instructional practices to accommodate special needs; recruitment and admission strategies to match students' educational needs; student personnel services; faculty and staff development programs; formative and summative evaluation strategies for nontraditional and developmental programs; reallocation of resources at state and institutional levels; and nontraditional procedures for collecting and analyzing retention data. (MSE)

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CREATING LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR IMPROVED STUDENT RETENTION: Developmental Education Conference Proceedings

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Creating Learning Environments for Improved Student Retention: Developmental Education Conference Proceedings

This professional inservice conference was sponsored by the Education Improvement Program (EIP) to focus on educational issues relating to the importance of creating learning environments for improved student retention. The conference was designed for administrators, faculty and staff who are committed to the idea that retention can be improved without sacrificing quality of instruction. This evaluation reports on the proceedings and outcome of this conference. EIP staff members appreciate the large number of institutional representatives attracted to this event and welcome comments, suggestions and reactions relative to this and other activities of the EIP.

George E. Rolle, Director
Evaluation and Research
Education Improvement Program

PREFACE

Few goals are more significant for society and for higher education institutions than (1) Improving the quality of student learning experiences and (2) Retaining enrolled students.

Aside from the ever-present and increasing problem of financing their education, there are other reasons why college students drop out. Primary among these is failure to meet the learning needs and expectations of students.

The Southern Association's Education Improvement Program has been involved for years in offering timely conferences and valuable consulting services. This document reports highlights of an EIP conference held early in 1981. Ideas put forth for this conference can be beneficial to all developing institutions.

Felix C. Robb
Executive Director
Southern Association of Colleges
and Schools

DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION

During the last two decades a number of social, political and economic factors have increased the pressure for educational change in the nation's colleges and universities. These factors have contributed to a social revolution in which large numbers of alienated Americans are demanding a more meaningful integration into the mainstream of American life--and the opportunity to share in the wealth of this nation. Perhaps more than any other single concern in achieving this end has been access to educational opportunities and ultimately educational achievement.

Over the last 10 to 15 years, and particularly since the passage of the Higher Education Act of 1965, there has developed a trend toward expanding opportunities in higher education through various "open-door" admission policies. These less-stringent admission procedures have encouraged large numbers of non-traditional students to enroll and participate in higher education.

Criticism of these modified admission policies and provisional acceptance procedures generally implies that access to college is but a hollow victory, unless students are offered learning alternatives. However, despite the criticism, the controversial open-door policy in higher education became a milestone for engendering the concept of universal opportunity for education beyond high school.

Many of today's students are not the typical 18 to 24 year old college students of the past. Some are part-time, others older students, and still others are minority students. A large number have come to campuses without adequate academic preparation in basic subject areas such as reading, writing and mathematics. Not only do they bring a great diversity of expectations, motivations and talents, they also bring a variety of learning styles and unique needs. These students do not fit into a well-defined pattern or category and they are not limited to any minority or underprivileged group. Indeed they are found throughout the entire population. They represent a group of *new students* and *non-traditional* students to the college environment.

Perhaps the most dramatic change in college enrollment during the 1970's has been among these new and non-traditional students. In fact, the rising number of students in this category has created concern for higher education's ability and/or willingness to adapt and respond to the specific needs of the group. But as more of these students are admitted to college, interest in a commitment to developmental education programs is likely to continue.

Many terms have been used to describe developmental education practices, including: directed, basic, guided, comprehensive, freshman studies, academic development, general education, and developmental studies. Regardless of the nomeclature, most of these structured programs are designed to develop students' basic skills to a level which allow them to enroll and matriculate successfully in college curriculum programs.

It has been found that institutional commitment to developmental programs is directly related to student achievement and success. Some colleges, of course, have long been active in providing special and extended assistance to educationally-underprepared and economically deficient individuals for whom higher education would otherwise be impractical. These institutions were the exception as the mainstream of higher education showed little concern for individuals handicapped by poverty, discrimination, and inadequate educational opportunities.

"... access to college is but a hollow victory, unless students are offered learning alternatives."

Unlike those institutions which have historically made provisions for students

with educational handicaps, in recent years a substantial number of institutions of higher education have accepted, at least in principle, the need for and the validity of special education programs to aid underprepared individuals to enter and succeed in college. In a recent survey of Education Improvement Program assisted institutions, information received shows that a wide variety of developmental education practices (special recruiting and admissions procedures, tutoring, pre-college preparatory courses, special curriculum counseling, and other practices) were being implemented.

Responses were received from 61 institutions of higher education, representing 80.3 percent of the 76 two-year and four-year institutions surveyed in eleven southern states served by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools for accreditation purposes. Institutions controlled by district and/or state governance (public) constitute 50.9 percent of the reporting institutions, and institutions controlled through religious (private) governance account for 49.1 percent of those responding. (See Table 1)

Of the 61 institutions, 59 (96.7 percent) reported they were implementing "some" developmental practices. Of the two-year institutions (public and private) replying, 100 percent reported "some" practices, as compated with 94.6 percent of four-year institutions (public and private) reporting developmental practices. (See Table 1)

With regard to the types of programs being offered, developmental reading, English, and mathematics in the college curriculum were widespread. Overall, two-year institutions reported a higher percentage of developmental programs (97%) than four-year institutions (78%). Perhaps because of the role, scope and mission of two-year institutions, developmental programs have been implemented on a wider scale at these institutions. All of the two-year institutions reported special admissions or "open-door" procedures (100%) as compared to (35%) for four-year institutions. It is interesting to note that while 78% of the four-year institutions reporting include developmental education programs in their curriculum, only 35% of this same group reported special admission or "open-door" procedures.

Table 1

Number and Precent of Institutions by Type of Control and Reporting "Some" Developmental Practices

Type of Control	Number of Institutions Responding	Percent Responding	Number Reporting "Some" Developmental Practices	Percent Reporting "Some" Developmental Practices
4 Yr. Private	28	45.9	27	47.5
4 Yr. Public	9	14.8	8	13.2
2 Yr. Private	2	3.2	2	3.2
2 Yr. Public	22	36.1	22	36.1
Total	61	100	59	100

Table 2 contains a graphic distribution of two and four-year institutions reporting developing programs and special admissions procedures.

CREATING LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR IMPROVED STUDENT RETENTION

The need to develop instructional systems that foster effective learning and improved student retention might well be the most serious challenge to higher education in the 1980's. How well we meet this challenge could determine which institutions will prosper and which will succumb to the problems of "drop-outs" and declining student enrollments.

This conference was designed for administrators, faculty, and staff who are committed to the idea that retention can be improved without sacrificing quality instruction. The emphasis was on

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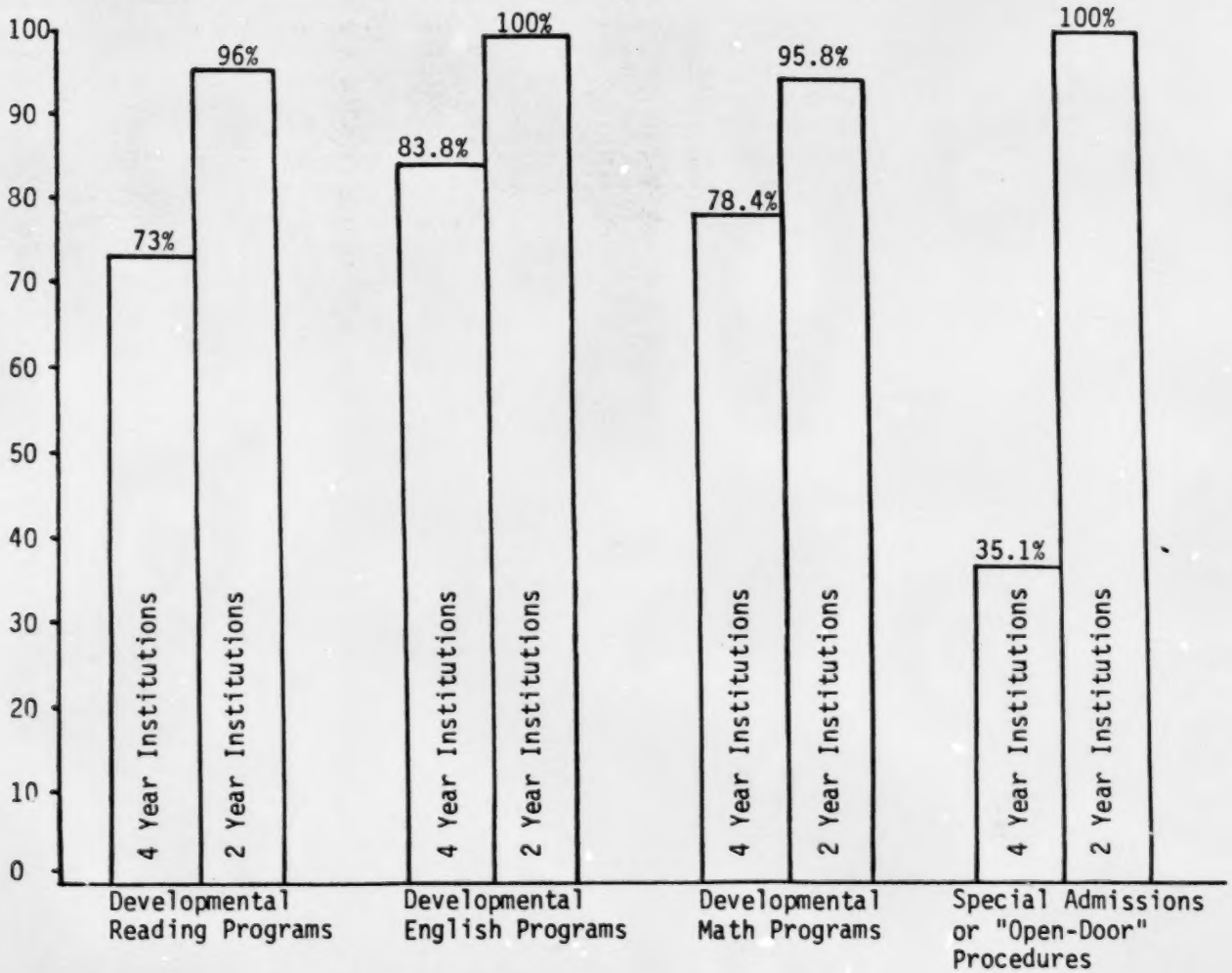
Table 2

Percentage of Two and Four Year Institutions With Reading, English, and Mathematics Developmental Programs; and Special Admissions or "Open-Door" Procedures



developing models of learning systems that unify the relationship of teacher, student, and environment--a departure from the traditional piece-meal attempts at remediation.

Dr. Willa B. Player

Dr. Felix Robb, Executive Director of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, provided a brief resume' of EIP activities and Dr. Edsel Godbey, Executive Director of EIP, introduced the keynote speaker, Dr. Willa B. Player. In her keynote presentation, Dr. Player, former director of the Division of Institutional Development, U.S. Office of Education, and formerly the President of Bennett College, highlighted the plight of underprepared students for upward mobility and success in higher education. Dr. Player indicated several basic premises which should be of primary importance in creating effective developmental education programs. She suggested that developmental students should not be denied access to college based on environmental, cultural, and socio-economic factors, and that the institution should take affirmative steps, through mission statements, physical support, etc. to design programs for students from all levels of socio-economic and cultural environments. She further contended that college age students are not without hope, and that previous academic performance should not be considered a totally accurate index to what future performance might hold.

Reminding participants that colleges are traditionally geared to students with demonstrated academic ability and that the "new student" does not fit into this mold, Dr. Player offered concrete suggestions for change with strong emphasis on designing programs tailored to the developmental needs of the non-traditional student.

Conference Format

Conference activities were structured through seminar-type arrangements which encouraged active participation, sharing, and open dialogue. Three resource consultants assisted in these activities. Participants were assigned to one of the three conference groups and rotated to each of the following sessions over the two-day period.

Needs Assessment: Course Development

Conducted by Dr. Joe L. Boyer, Professor of Education and Department Head of Foundations, Secondary, and Counselor Education at Auburn University at Montgomery, the objectives for this session were to examine key elements of the instructional environment and to suggest strategies for increasing retention by improving instruction. Through discussions, hands-on exercises, illustrations, and handouts, several items were treated:

Characteristics of Students. An analysis of selected intellectual, motivational, and perceptual skills of students helped participants indicate the extent to which given characteristics were evident in the students at their institution. From these characteristics a set of instructional goals was suggested. These goals were discussed in terms of their attainability within the time frame of four or two years, the competence of the faculty, and the environment climate and particular institutional concerns.

Instructional Objectives. The need for structure was agreed upon as the most effective organizational strategy. To this end, the behavioral objective

approach was suggested because of its emphasis on clarity in terms of what students are to learn and what teachers are to teach. Participants were provided an exercise to determine their familiarity with the conceptual and technical requirements of behavioral objectives.

Dr. Joe Boyer

Selection of Content. It was assumed that many students have not been very successful in mastering the content of the disciplines. It was therefore suggested that content be conceptualized from various perspectives and that a combination of the perspectives be used in the selection of content. Participants were cautioned against total reliance on textbook content and organization.

The Learning Process. Through visuals, the process by which learning occurs was examined and an exercise was used to illustrate salient features of the process.

Analysis Points. Handouts were used to show the need for analyzing selected features of classroom instruction. In addition, a model was proposed for use in observing, planning, and evaluating classroom instructional activities.

Instructional and Learning Styles

Dr. Albert A. Canfield, widely published in professional journals and best noted for his diagnostic inventories entitled *Canfield Learning Styles*, and *Canfield Instructional Styles*, led the session in exploring ways of improving the instructional-student characteristic interaction to facilitate improved student performance and persistence. During the session participants completed, scored, and profiled the learning styles inventory. With an explanation of the scales, the group was asked to utilize a profile in selecting specific instructional treatment that would correspond to the student's profile. Substantial agreement was expressed suggesting a practical and immediate translation of findings to specific instructional treatment.

The Instructional Styles Inventory was discussed and suggestions made for various uses of inventory findings. The relationship between learning and instructional styles, considered in relation to emerging and previous research, suggests that matching instructional materials and student characteristics has a positive effect on student performance and retention. The following points were emphasized for strengthening instructional programs

- Matching instructional process to student learning styles proves beneficial
- Learning and instructional styles involve learner-teacher interaction
- Using learning styles information can facilitate instruction and learning
- Research studies show that learners operating on low levels of motivation need more structure.

Dr. Albert Canfield

Analytical Reasoning

This session was conducted by Dr. Arthur Whimbey, author of Intelligence Can Be Taught, and co-author of a Workbook in Problem Solving and Comprehension: A Short Course in Analytical Reasoning. Dr. Whimbey currently serves as a resident scholar in Reading in the Department of General Education at Clark College in Atlanta.

Dr. Whimbey explained that the content of this workbook was based on recent research conducted by himself and other scholars on what good thinking is. Using materials extracted from the workbook that Dr. Whimbey co-authored with Jack Lochhead, each participant worked through several problems included in the Whimbey Analytical Skills Inventory (WASI). While explaining the correct responses to the inventory items and the problems that students frequently have with them, Dr. Whimbey outlined certain "keys to academic success" which in the past have often been denigrated by academicians. For example, he emphasized that it is necessary to read slowly and completely (not just "key words"), to make diagrams in order to visually analyze problems, to count on fingers when solving math problems, to read aloud, to "think" aloud, to regress or reread for improved comprehension, to listen to others' reasoning, etc. He went on to explain that great scholars, professors, and "problem solvers" rely upon such techniques for successful thinking and admit that they, too, are susceptible to gaps and lapses in memory. According to Whimbey, a number of myths about reading are still sometimes taught in remedial and developmental reading programs.

Using several visual aids, Dr. Whimbey demonstrated how the same keys to analytical reasoning can be transferred to various disciplines. He also emphasized the importance of guided activities in the classroom setting (even at the college level) where exchange between and among students should probably take precedence over the lecture method of instruction. To understand and improve thinking processes, ideas must be brought into the open. Teachers should do this by urging students to think aloud, to check answers carefully, to jot down notes and diagrams, and to take one thinking step at a time.

Dr. Arthur Whimbey

Dr. Whimbey reminded the groups that thinking involves a slow, logical process and that the suggestions made at this workshop and in his course in analytic reasoning should help the individual in learning how to learn. Commenting on the applicability of these techniques, Lochhead and Whimbey wrote that they "can help you on tests, in your academic courses, and in any occupations which involve analyzing, untangling or comprehending knott ideas."

Conference Evaluation

An evaluation questionnaire was developed and distributed to all participants for reactions and comments relative to the effectiveness of workshop activities. Of the 78 participants attending the conference, representing 47 two-year, four-year, and graduate institutions, 63 or 82% completed the evaluation instrument. Nearly 94% of those responding indicated that the goals and objectives of the conference were relevant and adequately achieved. In terms of ideas and information presented during the conference for strengthening professional competence and improving instruction, 92.7% indicated that hands-on materials and open discussions on pertinent issues were very beneficial.

More than 82% concluded that strong features of the conference were:

a) Planning and organization,

b) Selection of well-informed resource consultants, and

c) Opportunities to discuss relevant issues and exchange ideas with other institutional representatives.

To summarize, 89.4% indicated that information presented in the content areas and conference activities were relevant to problems encountered at institutions committed to developmental education, and helpful strategies toward solutions were provided.

Summary and Recommendations

Considerable attention has been focused on better serving non-traditional students in institutions of higher education. Most observers of the retention issue of non-traditional students believe that perhaps one of the greatest overall factors influencing a respectable retention rate among non-traditional students is the degree of institutional commitment.

Institutional commitment to serving non-traditional students and to developmental education programs is seen through adopting programs, policies, and administrative procedures to address specific needs of these students. In addition to policy and administrative procedures, recommendations for other types of action included the following:

- expand instructional practices to accommodate special needs
- develop recruitment and admission strategies to match students' educational needs
- expand counseling and other student personnel services
- create faculty and staff development programs
- develop and maintain effective formative and summative evaluation strategies for non-traditional and developmental programs
- reallocate resources at the state and institutional levels to fit specific needs and priorities
- develop non-traditional procedures for collecting, analyzing, and assessing retention data of new students

Education Improvement Program

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools is the accrediting agency for eleven Southern states. Since the basic concern of accreditation is the quality of education, the Education Improvement Program is an important component of the Association. EIP can respond to the need for innovation and directed change because it is flexible and has a deep interest in a variety of educational concerns. From its beginning in 1963 EIP has worked at many levels of education in different settings and with many kinds of learners.

Network of Cooperative Programs

Much of the work of the EIP staff is in helping postsecondary schools develop and strengthen their instructional and support programs. All have a common purpose: To assist students in developing and improving their learning skills. The network of cooperative programs includes 20 to 30 two-year and four-year colleges, each with different strengths. Some have focused on developing a reading program, or a math program, or comprehensive learning centers, or supportive services. All are working toward improvement in the quality of programs availabe to "new students" whose experiences, environment, and education have not equipped them for postsecondary education. EIP coordinates regional staff development activities for the cooperative programs, conferences for program directors, training workshops for staff, assistance in developing curriculum, and assistance in eval-

uation. Most colleges and schools related to EIP's network of cooperative programs are funded through Title III grants by the Developing Institutions Branch of the U. S. Office of Education.

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APPENDIX

List of Conference Participants